(b) if so, the action taken to take up the matter with the appropriate counterparts in Austria for redressal of such incidents?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir. An incident of harassment of a Delhi-based lady architect at Vienna airport has been brought to the notice of the Government.

(b) Government took up the matter with the Austrian Government and the Austrian Government has undertaken an internal investigation into this allegation.

Invalidating Indian passports for Iraq

2442. SHRI TARIQ ANWAR: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have decided not to make the passports of Indians valid for Iraq for the time being;

(b) if so, the reason therefor; and

(c) the number of people to be affected by this decision?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) and (b) Taking into account the current security situation in Iraq, Government of India have, for the time being, advised its citizens to defer their visits to that country and decided that the Protector of Emigrants, while giving emigration clearance for Kuwait and Jordan, will endorse a "NOT VALID FOR TRAVEL TO IRAQ" stamp in the passports. The Government have also sought cooperation of the Governments of Kuwait and Jordan to prevent Indian nationals from crossing over to Iraq. This measure is motivated out of concern for the safety and security of Indian nationals.

(c) It is difficult to give an estimate on this point.

India's claim for permanent seat in Un Security Council

2443. SHRI SHAHID SIDDIQUI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Germany is backing India's claim for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council;

(b) which are the other countries which has promised to back India on this issue; and

(c) whether Government have discussed this issue with USA, if so, what is the response of United States?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) Yes. During the recent visit of German Foreign Minister, Mr. Joschka Fischer, to India in July 2004, India and Germany agreed that they considered each other to be "natural candidates" for a permanent seat in an enlarged Security Council and would support each other in this endeavour.

(b) There is a growing momentum in support of India's candidature for permanent membership. Several countries — permanent members as well as others — have openly expressed support for India's candidature either in the UN or in the context of bilateral exchanges. Such support is expressed in different forums and forms and it is therefore, difficult to give a definitive number on countries which have specifically supported India.

(c) The Government pursues India's candidature with various countries, including with the USA, on appropriate occasions. The USA has not taken a clear position on this issue.

Meeting of Foreign Ministers of SAARC countries

2444. SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a meeting of Foreign Ministers of SAARC countries was held in Islamabad from July 18, 2004 onwards;

(b) whether any agenda for the ensuing SAARC Summit was decided upon in this meeting; and

(c) whether Pakistan underscored the need for inclusion of peace and security issues for the SAARC to emerge as a vibrant organization, if so, what was India's stand in regard thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) The 25th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of SAARC was held in Islamabad on July 20-21, 2004.